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THE LONG VACATION AND THE AFTERNOON LESSONS IN GERMANY.

THE chief result of the Franco-German war, as far as Germany was concerned, was the union of all German states under one emperor. In spite of this union there still remain in school matters many prominent points of difference. The army, the navy, the postal service are subject to one will only, that of the emperor; the law, too, has recently become common to all, the new civil code having been introduced in all Germany with the beginning of the new century. But in school affairs our country presents an uneven, and sometimes discouraging, front. Each state, however small and inconsiderable, tries to have a distinctive school program, a particular scale of salaries for the teachers, a new method of teaching, etc.; in short, to show that it is as independent as the great leading power, the incomparable energy of which created Germany an age since.

The most dismal difference prevails in the distribution of the vacations over the year. In Prussia the long vacation extends over the month of July, and lasts four and a half weeks. There are also the Easter and Christmas holidays of about a fortnight's duration, and the Pentecost and Michaelmas vacations, which last one week. In Saxony the long vacation begins on the third Saturday in July and extends over five weeks in the great towns, four weeks in the smaller. In the southern states it begins in the middle or toward the end of August and lasts until the end of September or the middle of October.

This last method of providing for a long vacation of from six to eight weeks is becoming increasingly popular in Germany, and has many points in its favor. This change will necessitate some reorganization of the system and the examination for the certificate of maturity, now held in the northern and middle German states in Easter, will have to be held at a more convenient time. It would not affect the elementary schools, as the boys and girls leave school at Easter after their confirmation to

enter some trade. But the schools for the middle classes, those which send their boys to universities and academies, have two terms—one in summer, the other in winter. Now, if the young boys leave school in August, they have an opportunity to rest for two months after the fatigue of the examination. Again, if the long vacation were put in August and September, there would be the desirable advantage of having the vacations of the middle and of the high school at the same time. In this way parents who have boys in both kinds of schools may arrange for a family vacation without discriminating against any of the studying children.

To accomplish this result the other vacations of the year must be shortened, and it is likely that the Pentecost and Michaelmas will be abolished, while at Easter and Christmas there will be but a week. The benefit of such an arrangement would be very great. To be entirely free and master of one's time after carrying the heavy burden of school work for ten months! The dusty, unwholesome air of our class-rooms is exchanged for the pure, bracing air of outdoor life. Legs "rusted with the vile repose" of recitation rooms and uncomfortable desks now have a chance to perform their function of carrying their owner up mountain sides and through valleys. The teacher of history can *see*, not *read about* Greece and Rome; the teacher of modern languages can freshen up his knowledge of the languages of Shakespeare and Molière, may visit the large centers of art, commerce, and industry. The long vacation will be an important educational movement toward emancipation of teacher and of pupil, and will help them to broaden their views of life.

There is another deficiency in the German middle school, viz., the afternoon lessons. If it is somewhat of a refined torture for a healthy boy between the ages of ten and fifteen years to sit straight as a doll during five hours in the forenoon, listening intently to what the teachers say, it is a double rack for mind and body to keep him in the schoolroom for two additional hours during the afternoon. It is a still further aggravation during summer weather. This criticism is not intended to apply

to the drawing and singing lessons, or indeed the lessons in gymnastics, as these belong rightly to the afternoon. I remember when but a mere child I had fallen asleep in the writing lesson. I had a two hours' walk to school every day, for my parents lived in the country, and a good school could not be found except in the town. There were six of us, and father could not afford to pay for board and lodging in town, so we had to make our way daily, on foot, through wet mornings and sultry afternoons. It was a shadeless walk along the river bank, and we had to run the gauntlet of the usual mob of town children who tried to make the country child's life even more miserable. It was on one of the sultry afternoons that my head dropped on the table and my pen under the form. The particulars of the first act of the scene that followed were furnished by my comrades, who stated that the eagle eye of the teacher quickly took in the situation and down he came on tip toe with the birch-rod behind him. But the sequel proved a happy one. Before striking the offender, he looked at my face, covered as it was with perspiration. "It is not natural" said he, softly awakened me and sent me home.

This was in the elementary school, but the tortures that I afterwards suffered in the gymnasium during the afternoon lessons were not a whit less. To keep awake I pinched my thighs so hard that they were brown and blue. When I reached the higher classes, I did not suffer as much for I devised a means of meeting this difficulty. It was a custom in those classes that those who knew the answer to the question propounded by the teacher should stand up. This movement was to me a great relief, so I rose for every question whether I was sure of the answer or not. Thus was I kept awake and received the reputation of being a zealous pupil. My experiences, both as pupil and as teacher, have led me to doubt the value of the afternoon lessons. They are ruinous to the health of the pupil, both in body and mind, for this constant restraint makes boys nervous and they are not less a hindrance to the master.

If he is cruel, the afternoon lessons give him cause and opportunity to inflict numerous punishments on boys who are

not attentive or who give incorrect answers. The list of punishments grows in a manner that alarms and displeases the head master, to whom it must be shown from time to time, and this displeasure is not hidden from the teacher; so far from it, indeed, that the teacher's ears often tingle with what the stern monarch of the school has said to him after the perusal of the report.

By the kind teacher the afternoon lessons are considered as lost time and labor. He will not punish the boys if, from mere drowsiness, they give strange answers; he tries to lighten the dreadful task by having the floors sprinkled and the blinds closely drawn; most of the work he does himself, giving model translations of difficult passages, though he recognizes that they are not in the mood to remember much of what he is telling them.

There is an element of danger to this teacher because it may happen that the supervisor may come upon him in such a lesson. These "sacred counsellors" of the secretary of the state for public instruction and "his excellency" himself make visiting tours each year.

It is manifestly unfair that a teacher's worth be estimated by an inspection of afternoon lessons alone and so I am pleading for a reconstruction of our programs, abolishing many of the afternoon lessons, especially in the lower grades, and having only laboratory work, singing, gymnastics, etc., in the upper grades in the afternoons.

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